Caleb Schantz

Professor Wendt

ENG 201

16 February 2016

Unit 2 Rough Draft

Will Rogers, a famous cinema actor, said that, “advertising is the art of convincing people to spend money they don't have for something they don't need” (Tungate, 2007, p. 107). Famous advertiser Leo Burnett saw it differently: “advertising does not just circulate information. It penetrates the public mind with desires and belief” (Tungate, 2007, p. 108). Advertising is looked down upon by many and enjoyed by some, but it has undoubtedly become a necessary part of the modern world. Throughout history it has evolved, for better and worse, to reach consumers. Advertising has changed from simple text to flowing animations and colorful graphics. Ads used to convince consumers with interesting and useful product features, but now consumers buy a brand image. They buy a product for the intangible experience it represents rather than physical features. After acknowledging this trend two main questions remain: what key factors influenced and caused this to occur and what are the effects upon humanity?

From the 1950s to present day there has been a massive shift in advertising from a product centric view to a focus on brand image and the experience of using a product (Sivulka, 2012, 115). Before this trend there were many historical events in American advertising that laid the groundwork, for this pivotal shift in advertising. Throughout “United States history, advertising has responded to changing business demands, media technologies, and cultural contexts” (Pope, n.d.). The first American advertisements began appearing in newspapers during the colonial era. These ads consisted of plain text that simply described available products or services. Not until Benjamin Franklin’s *Pennsylvania Gazette* were more elaborate additions made, such as headlines and illustrations. Still for the next hundred years advertisings remained relatively simple. Even during the “‘market revolution’ (a drastic change in manual labor directly preceding the industrial revolution) early and mid- nineteenth-century advertisements rarely demonstrated striking changes in advertising appeals" (Sivulka, 2012 116). "Newspapers almost never printed ads wider than a single column and generally eschewed illustrations and even special typefaces." The industrial revolution in the 1880’s started to dramatically change advertising. New production techniques and efficiencies caused more goods to be created at lower costs. This mass of products created a need to “find and persuade buyers” and thus began the “national advertising of branded goods.” Formerly in the business of buying and selling advertising space, agencies began to change their role in business relationships (Allor, 2006, para. ? ). The emergence of national advertising campaigns at the turn of the century created the need for advertising experts and agencies to begin “designing copy and artwork” and finding optimal locations to place advertisements. By a common measure, total advertising volume in the United States grew from $200 million in 1880 to almost $3 billion in 1920. Throughout the 1920s the growth of advertising began to increase even more rapidly and “acquired a new centrality [in American culture]”(Pope). Increased availability of consumer credit caused spending to skyrocket giving rise to an era dubbed the roaring twenties. Additionally, prominence of mass circulation magazines, radio and even motion pictures provided new mediums for advertisers. Advertisers also had the support of the president at the time. Calvin Coolidge gave a benediction on the business of advertising in a 1926 speech: “Advertising ministers to the spiritual side of trade. It is a great power that has been entrusted to your keeping which charges you with the high responsibility of inspiring and ennobling the commercial world. It is all part of the greater work of regeneration and redemption of mankind.”

Coolidge and others leaders of the day such as Herbert Hoover, the Secretary of Commerce and later president, “placed an undue emphasis on consumerism in a false sense of security that the monopolized market for new technologies would carry Americans through to unrivaled wealth and prosperity” (Allor, 2006). In reality, many historians believe this consumerism, though it did improve the quality of life for some, created an “illusion of demand.” This over saturation of products is thought to be one of the major causes of the great depression (Tungate 189).

From the 1920s to the 1950s advertising continued to grow at an exponential rate, with expenditures eighty times greater mid century than during the twenties (Sivulka 128). While many changes occurred leading up to the 1950s, especially in technology, advertising retained many continuities. Advertising men still held most of the leadership positions; females would not begin entering the field en-masse until the late 20th century. At the beginning of the 1950’s the relationship between advertiser, agency and medium remained. This advertising troika would set the stage for many changes to come. A creative revolution was just beginning to emerge that would segment the market and target certain groups (Allor, 2006). This switch from mass to niche advertising began the monumental changes that would shape advertising into the 21st century.

The shift in advertising from a focus on product features to a focus on the experience did not happen by chance but instead by technology advances, changes in the delivery medium, and government influence and regulation. In 1941 the first television commercial aired, which catalyzed the rapid decline of print advertisements. By 1954 U.S. television network CBS had become the largest advertising medium in the world (Staff 5). This is significant because in the book *Amusing Ourselves to Death* Neil Postman argues that the “medium is the message”(16). Essentially, the channel by which a message is delivered determines the content of the message. For example, print ads are more conducive to text because words are cheaply printed and allow the consumer to patiently read and comprehend the message without time constraints. TV, however, is characterized by quick flashing frames of pixels which offer a far superior medium for images, but are not apt at displaying text beyond simple headlines. This tends to create advertisements that are dominated by images. This new orientation towards increasing imagery progressed exponentially in the 1960s as the “rising cost of airtime began shrinking television advertisements to 30 seconds”(Staff 5). Images, by nature, better convey experiences, while text allows a more focused expression of information and ideas. Thus, advertisements became less informative and focused instead on the experience and emotions that a particular product could bring. Postman stated this phenomenon well: “The television commercial is not at all about the character of products to be consumed. It is about the character of the consumers of products” (Postman 128). It does not necessarily matter if the product has features the consumer needs, as long as it appeals to their character. Nicholas Carr, a graduate of Harvard and a New York Times best selling author, says it even more blatantly:

“Our conventional response to all media, namely that it is how they are used that counts, is the numb stance of the technological idiot,” he wrote. The content of the medium is just “the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind”(Carr 44). Both writers express the idea that the product doesn’t matter as much as the way it is advertised to appeal to the customer.

Another factor that has brought more images, and thus more experience based advertising, is the decreasing cost of capturing images. New, more affordable technology has allowed higher quality at increasingly lower prices. The reason for the decrease in prices can be understood by Wright’s Law: “Progress increases with experience — specifically, that each percent increase in cumulative production in a given industry results in a fixed percentage improvement in production efficiency.” Thus, the inflation adjusted price of one unit of technology will progressively go down (McCormick). As the price of cameras and other production equipment dropped, more companies could afford production costs. One milestone that marked this occurrence was the launch of MTV in 1981 which “ushered in an era of cutting edge music videos and pop culture that influenced advertising” (Staff). After this most advertising became some form of entertainment utilizing less text and product features and more images and emotions, thus shifting towards an emphasis on the experience. Researchers George and Michael Belch conducted studies on modern advertising and published their work in 2003. The following quote is one observation they drew connecting advertising to entertainment:

“Many experts argue that “branded content” is the wave of the future, and there is a growing movement to reinvent advertising and other forms of marketing communication to be more akin to entertainment. Companies such as BMW, Levi Straus & Co., Nike, and Skyy Spirits are among the marketers using ‘advertainment’ as a way of reaching consumers” (4).

Another element that contributed to the change in ideologies was the government influence and regulation on advertising. Regulations in the U.S forced agencies to adapt. “In 1958 The National Association of Broadcasters banned subliminal advertisements”(Dujnic). This compelled other, more overt methods to be contrived that would still appeal to inherent consumer buying motives. In 1983 direct to consumer drug ads were made legal, which effectively transformed the pharmaceutical advertising industry. Ads no longer had to appeal to doctors or other medical professionals with health care jargon and statistics. They could now market directly to consumers using entertainment techniques of advertising (Staff). Drug companies portrayed people in their ads who were sad and hurting before using a drug, and after were smiling and jubilant. This played on consumers’ emotions of fear, pain, love and happiness. Celebrity endorsements have, for the past several decades, been very useful for selling products and in recent years even drug companies are using celebrities to sell pharmaceuticals (The Impact). Nyquil, a cold and flu relief medication, has been airing ads that portray quarterbacks and other professional football players using the drug, hoping to make an ethos appeal to consumers (Medernach). While the government has put many restrictions on advertising, they have also embraced it as a way to promote future political leaders and new ideas. In fact, the type of advertising used is much more focused on an emotional response towards leaders or ideas, than a knowledge of specific facts. Postman says that “This is the lesson of all great television commercials: They provide a slogan, a symbol or a focus that creates for viewers a comprehensive and compelling image of themselves.” (115). Neil Postman believed that this is the most effective way to advertise, and he even goes on to say this is the way political advertising is conducted:

“In the shift from party politics to television politics, the same goal is sought. We are not permitted to know who is best at being President or Governor or Senator, but whose image is best in touching and soothing the deep reaches of our discontent. We look at the television screen and ask, in the same voracious way as the Queen in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 'Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?' We are inclined to vote for those whose personality, family life, and style, as imaged on the screen, give back a better answer than the Queen received” (116).

As these “television politics” became mainstream their effect on voters were studied. Researchers found that elections were won by candidates who advertised well; playing on the emotions of the viewers (Western). Often these ads lacked substance and real information, but they were able to create such a strong emotional response that overcame even ideological barriers. Military advertisements also drove this trend in emotion-filled experienced based advertisements. An example are the promotions used during WWII to recruit soldiers:

“Posters during World War II were designed to instill in the people a positive outlook, a sense of patriotism and confidence. They linked the war in trenches with the war at home. Posters were used for recruitment, productivity, and motivation as well as for financing the war effort. The stark, colorful graphic designs elicited strong emotions. The posters played to the fears, frustrations, and faith in freedoms that lingered in people's minds during the war” (The Most Famous Poster).

In the most famous of these posters Uncle Sam pointed and demanded that young boys across the country enlist in the army. Patriotism and loyalty welled up inside them, and millions enlisted without knowing anything about the harsh realities of war. Even the artist of the poster, James Montgomery Flagg, remarked on his regret for sending thousands of young men to their deaths (The Most Famous Poster). He realized the power he wielded with advertisements that appealed to pathos. This power is why Flagg, the U.S. government, and politicians all started using this new type of advertising strategy. They saw the effect of not only appealing to the logical mind but also the heart; the very quintessence of the soul.

Effects

As a result of the movement towards experienced based advertising, the world experienced major shockwaves as consumers minds and the nature of text changed. The first effect occurred because of the shift towards imagery as primary delivery medium. As consumers were exposed to more images, their brains physically adapted and changed. In *The Shallows*, Nicholas Carr states this idea:

“Every medium develops some cognitive skills at the expense of others. Our growing use of...screen-based technologies has led to the ‘widespread and sophisticated development of visual-spatial skills.’ We can, for example, rotate objects in our minds better than we used to be able to. But our new strengths in visual-spatial intelligence go hand in hand with a weakening of our capacities for the kind of ‘deep processing’ that underpins mindful knowledge acquisition” (55).

As the minds of consumers began to rearrange, they became even more enamored with imagery, and “where the viewers go the ads follow” (Yu). This lead to more advertisements that used still and moving images to convey what they could best show: an experience.

Another effect in the mind of the consumer was effected by the advent the internet. The world became instantly connected and created the need for faster advertising messages increased. This once again caused the consumers mental state to adapt.

A “calm, focused, undistracted, linear mind is being pushed aside by a new kind of mind that wants and needs to take in and dole out information in short, disjointed, often overlapping bursts—the faster, the better.” The mind changed because of neuroplasticity. Essentially “as particular circuits in our brain strengthen through the repetition of a physical or mental activity, they begin to transform that activity into a habit. The paradox of neuroplasticity is that for all the mental flexibility it grants us, it can end up locking us into ‘rigid behaviors’” (Carr 33).

Essentially, consumers adapted to using the internet, which created the need for a development of new faster forms of advertising. Again creating a continuous cycle that fed itself and continued to accelerate.

A third effect of the change in advertising is the morphing of text. Even the text used now in advertising is completely different from how text used to be used. Text seventy years ago was discrete and simple without any distractions. It was altogether a different experience than reading text now:

“To be confronted by the cold abstractions of printed sentences is to look upon language bare, without the assistance of either beauty or community. Thus, reading is by its nature a serious business. It is also, of course, an essentially rational activity” (Postman 74).

According to Carr it requires a “Calm, focused, undistracted, [and] linear mind.” A mind that no longer exists and that instead desires instant, fragmented information (Carr 33). Words on the internet are more related to the quick flashing images of the Television than to words in a traditional book. The consumers minds have changed and this has affected the shift in advertising. “Experiments show that just as the brain can build new or stronger circuits through physical or mental practice, those circuits can weaken or dissolve with neglect” (Belch). Over time peoples aptitude for books has declined, and thus the effectiveness of traditional advertising has also dwindled.

Conclusion

Being aware of what has happened may grant a new perspective that is more conscious to current trends. This new insight could allow a directing of the present towards a future that we would be willing to live in. "Destiny is no matter of chance. It is a matter of choice. It is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved" (William Jennings Bryan).

Modern advertising despite its assets has, in part, created a facade of American idealism. People see this ideal human being presented to them in the media that does not actually exist. Advertising has become so technologically advanced that it can create anything, even something completely false, and people reach for this pseudo image of what they believe they should be. Affects can be seen in teen suicide rates, divorces and fatherless families. People run after an image with such voracity that they leave the very ones who love them for who they are. Advertising was created to control people, but when we realize its gone to far, it is our duty to reign in this avaricious beast and subdue it.

Works Cited

Allor, K. (2006, August 24). The Rise of Advertisement and American Consumer Culture. Retrieved February 15, 2016, from http://teaching.msa.maryland.gov/000001/000000/000129/html/t129.html

Bayer, R. (2002, March). Tobacco, Commercial Speech, and Libertarian Values: The End of the Line for Restrictions on Advertising? Retrieved February 10, 2016, from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1447076/>

Belch, G. E., & Belch, M. A. (2003, April 3). Advertising and Promotion. Retrieved February 12, 2016.

Dujnic, N. (n.d.). The War on Apathy. Retrieved February 11, 2016.

John, A. (2012, February 2). After 1984: The Super Bowl Ad That Almost Killed Apple. Retrieved February 12, 2016, from [http://www.forbes.com/sites/allenstjohn/2012/02/02/the-super- bowl-ad-that-almost-killed-apple/#7f69ed7412d9](http://www.forbes.com/sites/allenstjohn/2012/02/02/the-super-%09bowl-ad-that-almost-killed-apple/#7f69ed7412d9)

McCormick, D. (2012, July 25). Wright's Law Edges Out Moore's Law in Predicting Technology Development. Retrieved February 14, 2016, from [http://spectrum.ieee.org/tech-talk/at- work/test-and-measurement/wrights-law-edges-out-moores-law-in-predicting- technology-development](http://spectrum.ieee.org/tech-talk/at-%09work/test-and-measurement/wrights-law-edges-out-moores-law-in-predicting-%09technology-development)